

Submission & Sacrifice

Long Beach Alliance Church • September 13, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

~Ephesians 5:31-33 (ESV)

1) The Diverse Households of Ephesus

- A) The ancient world experienced a great range of marriage relationships. Some marriages were harshly ruled by heavy-handed husbands who exerted total dominance over their wives, demanding unquestioned obedience through absolute control over all decisions in the marriage and family. But, for the first time in history, the “new Roman woman” also emerged, with freedoms and independence in a variety of public roles including education, vocations, and in political positions with vast authoritative responsibilities.
- B) Wealthier Roman women shed their veils (a symbol of a husband’s authority), and began initiating sexual relationships with both single and married men. With newfound freedoms, “new Roman women” dressed in increasingly revealing outfits, wore flashy jewelry, heavy cosmetics, used female contraception, and when children were unwanted or inconvenient, began aborting their own babies.
- C) Simultaneously, the roles of men in Roman society were also experiencing rapid change. Goddess cults (like the female Artemis, Isis, and Cybele cults of Ephesus) increasingly removed the constraints of women, but interestingly brought about a religious movement amongst some men who self-castrated and identified as females through wild clothing, mannerisms, and notably high-pitched feminine voices.
- D) As a diverse background of men and women became Christians in Asia Minor, and since Ephesus was a cultural and financial hub in the region, Paul writes to Christian households with some radical challenges!

2) Christian Households In The Crosshairs

- A) The Ephesian “household codes” (Ephesians 5:21-6:9) are best understood as a declaration of war against the “rule and authority and power and dominion” (1:21-23) of the world in which Christ followers live. Paul’s Ephesian letter serves as a manifesto of how followers of Christ are to live because of the victory which Christ has secured over the “cosmic powers” of death and the “spiritual forces of evil” of our age (6:12).
- B) God powerfully declares the definitive victory of Christ over evil “in which you once walked” (2:2), but now through Christ have been rescued (2:4-10). Christ has created a new people of God, His victorious church, by which God declares the good news of the Gospel over evil heavenly “rulers and authorities” (3:8-10).
- C) Secured in Christ as one body and empowered by God’s Holy Spirit (4:1-14) as overcomers, our new life in Christ locates us in His church, placed on the front lines of enemy territory in the midst of this evil age (4:17-5:21) for Gospel purposes, revealed through our marriages, families, and household relationships (5:21-6:9).
- D) It’s no mistake that Paul speaks of spiritual warfare following the household code instructions (6:10-20), because the whole of Ephesians is about God’s power defeating evil powers. Paul’s words to married couples in Ephesus (5:21-33) are never meant to support any type of marital “status quo,” but rather serve as a radical manifesto of marriage recreated in Christ, two new-selves married together in submission to Christ!

3) Mutual Submission, Submitting Wives, and Heady Husbands?

- A) The marriage instructions for wives and husbands (5:22-33) begins earlier with the Spirit’s control, mutual thanksgiving and worship, and mutual submission to one another (5:18-21). The word “submit” rightly carries over its force and meaning from Ephesians 5:21 to 5:22, becoming more specific and focused for wives.
- B) The rationale for a wife’s submission is a husband is the “head” of the wife (5:23). A husband’s headship is compared to Christ being the head of the church, the leader or authority of the church (5:23-24). Something seems screwy when mutual submission immediately becomes wives submitting and headship being designated for husbands! What do these emotionally loaded phrases mean and why does Paul write them?

